

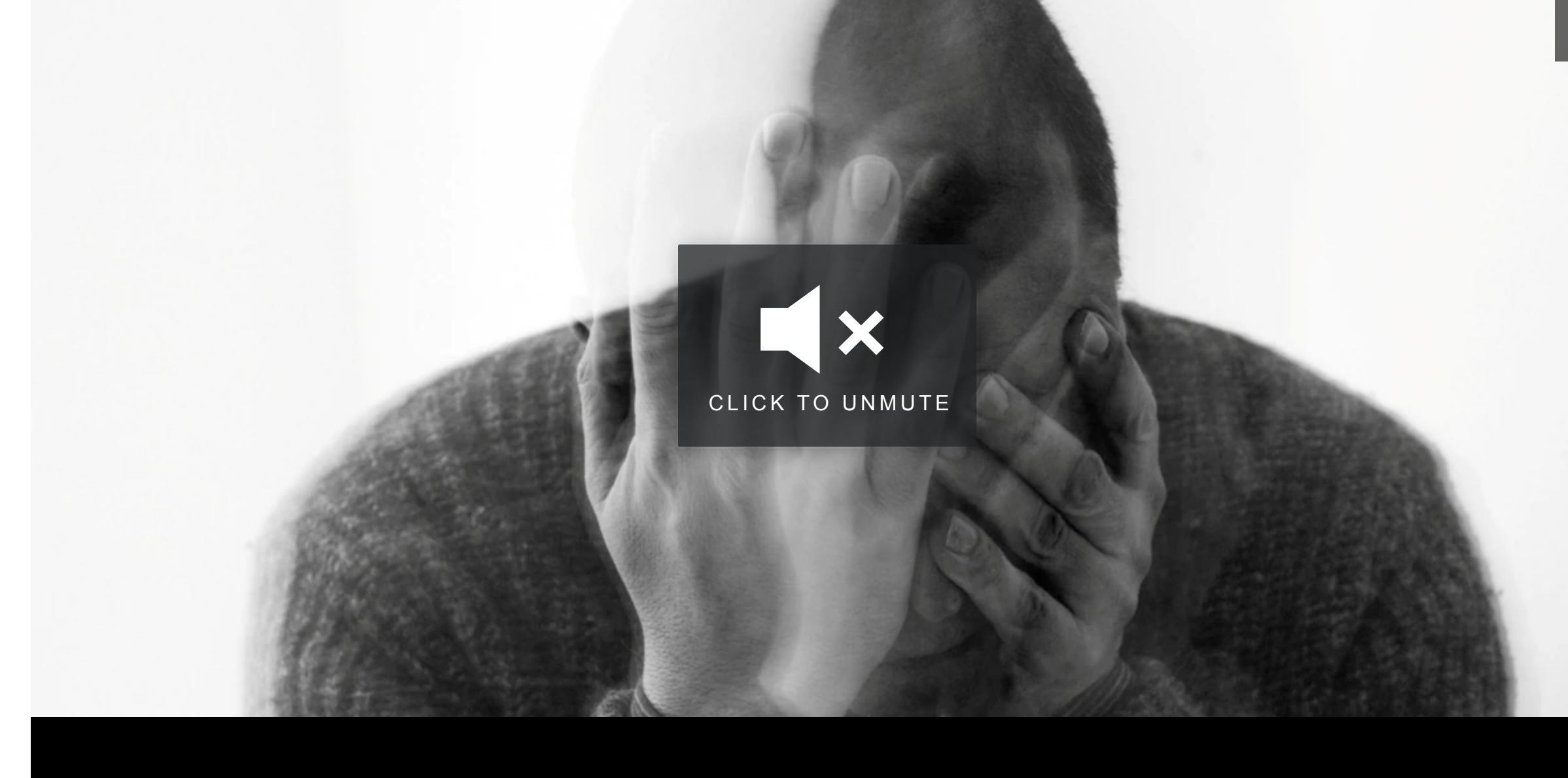
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Psychologists slam Health Minister Mark Butler over mental health crisis

After slashing subsidised psychology sessions, the federal Health minister has been accused of leaving mental health professionals in the dark without a larger plan to tackle the nation's unfolding mental health crisis.

Clare Armstrong [Follow](#)

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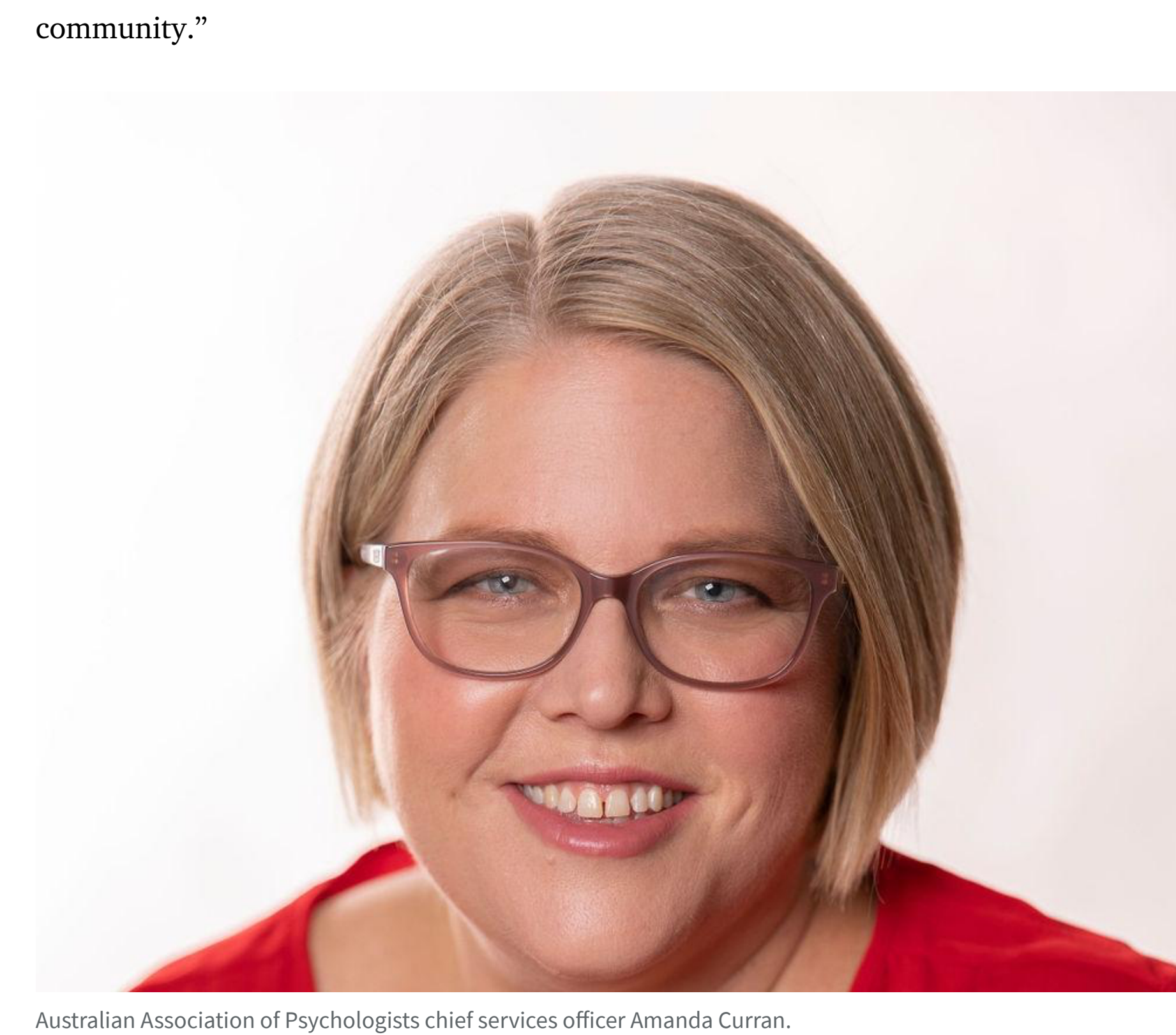
A leading psychologist group has accused Health Minister Mark Butler of leaving them in the dark over Labor's plans to address Australia's mental health crisis after slashing Medicare-funded sessions.

A stoush has erupted between the Australian Association of Psychologists (AAPI) and Mr Butler over a lack of consultation since experts were brought together for a forum in January to discuss [reforms to the mental health sector](#).

After criticising the government's decision to halve the number of subsidised psychology sessions Australians can receive from 20 to 10 a year, AAPI chief operating officer Amanda Curran said the peak body had not been consulted in the three months since the forum.

"Usually we'd be kept up to date with where things were at or there'd be some kind of plan going forward, but there's been none," she said.

"We're seeing Australians running out of their referred sessions already and have nowhere to go, they can't afford to pay for care. We're seeing a lot of distress in the community."



Australian Association of Psychologists chief services officer Amanda Curran.

Australian Clinical Psychology Association's Professor Caroline Hunt said she had been involved in follow up conversations with the government, though acknowledged the timeline for a final policy response was not clear.

"The message I've been getting is the government understands it's very complex and don't want to be putting in any measures quickly that have perverse outcomes," she said.



It comes after subsidies for psychology sessions were slashed from 20 sessions down to 10.

Chief executive of youth mental health service Batyr Australia Nic Brown said it was difficult to get a "line of sight" on the government's plan.

"We certainly feel like there's opportunity for us to contribute, what we're not seeing is that translating into real action, or clear pathways for change," he said.

Mr Brown said there were relevant arguments for both sides about the 20 sessions, but the "more important" question was what were the alternative solutions.

"We're really waiting to see where the priorities lie," he said.



Australian Minister for Health and Aged Care Mark Butler. Picture: Martin Ollman

The government has blamed the 20 sessions for fuelling inequity in the system, with fewer people able to access psychology appointments overall.

Mr Butler said the mental health stakeholders forum in January was an "extremely productive discussion" that had made it clear a "Band-Aid" policy approach would not cut it.

"This reform will not occur overnight – and cannot be done within a single Budget or by a single government," he said.

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Mr Butler said since the forum he and Assistant Mental Health Minister Emma McBride had engaged with "key stakeholders," including through workshops.

"During these forums no-one other than those representing private psychologists, said we should reintroduce those 10 extra sessions in a blanket fashion," he said.

"The Australian Government is committed to expanding the range and supply of psychological services for everyone, but this ultimately will involve building the mental health workforce and developing new digital and direct models of service."

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